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AN INQUIRY INTO THE DEPARTMENTAL SYSTEM

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In connection with a study of the Six-and-Six plan and the reorganization of the upper grammar grades, it occurred to me that it might be of interest to ascertain the attitude of the pupils of the seventh and eighth grades toward the departmental system which has been in operation in these grades for about three years.

I accordingly prepared a brief questionnaire, which was distributed to all the pupils of the seventh and eighth grades in our public schools. The questionnaire was as follows:

AN INQUIRY AS TO THE DEPARTMENTAL SYSTEM

Name School Grade
Date

Which do you like better, one teacher for all subjects, as you formerly had it, or different teachers for different subjects, as you have it now?

State, in a sentence or two, the reason for the answer you give.

The pupils were given the utmost freedom as to the nature and form of their reply, and no suggestion was offered that could in any way influence them in their expression of a preference. The replies may therefore be fairly interpreted to represent the untrammeled and candid sentiments of those who gave them, and, within the modest bounds set by the questionnaire, the results may be accepted as trustworthy.

The answers of the pupils disclose the fact that more than 80 per cent prefer the departmental to the one-teacher system. In other words, the majority for the departmental system is as four to one, with a little to spare. The exact figures are as follows:

Total number responding to inquiry	462
" " favoring different teachers for different subjects	382
Total number favoring one-teacher system.....	80
Percentage " departmental "82+

VOTE BY GIRLS AND BOYS

The girls show a larger percentage in favor of the departmental system than do the boys. In this respect the replies give the following results:

Total number of boys responding to inquiry	222
" " " " favoring departmental system	170
" " " " one-teacher "	52
Percentage " " " " departmental "76+
Total number of girls responding to inquiry	240
" " " " favoring departmental system	212
" " " " one-teacher "	28
Percentage " " " " departmental "88+

PREFERENCE BY GRADES

In studying the preferences by grades we find that the eighth grade is somewhat more strongly inclined toward the departmental system than the seventh grade. This is as it should be, assuming that the system is an improvement on the one-teacher-for-a-grade system. If the eighth grade showed a diminishing percentage favorable to the system, it would be an indication that it was not standing the test of time.

The statistics yield the following results:

Total number of eighth-grade pupils responding to inquiry .	229
" " " " favoring departmental system	198
Percentage " " " "86
Total number of seventh-grade pupils responding to inquiry	233
" " " " favoring departmental system	184
Percentage " " " "(nearly)	.79

There is thus apparent an advance of 7 per cent in the showing favorable to the departmental system.

BY HALF-GRADES

Studying the figures by half-grades, we find that the A₇, B₈, and A₈, are approximately the same, the percentages being respectively: 87, 86, and 87. There is a slightly lower percentage in the B₈ than in the A₇, but it is not enough to be significant. The percentage for the B₇, however, is only 69; from which point it jumps to 87 in the B₈. It is evident that many pupils have not

become adjusted to the new methods in B₇, where the departmental system is first put into operation, and as a result the number of those favoring it is considerably smaller. It is evident, too, that as soon as they become adjusted to it they show no diminution in fidelity. The figures bearing out the above percentages are as follows:

Total number of A8 pupils answering inquiry.....	108
" " favoring departmental system.....	94
Percentage A8 " " "87
 Total number B8 pupils answering inquiry.....	121
" " favoring departmental system.....	104
Percentage B8 " " "86
 Total number of A7 pupils answering inquiry.....	124
" " favoring departmental system.....	108
Percentage A7 " " "87
 Total number of B7 pupils answering inquiry.....	109
" " favoring departmental system.....	76
Percentage B7 " " "69

THE GRADES BY BOYS AND GIRLS

When we study the grade replies by boys and girls, we find the results given in Table I.

TABLE I

	No. Replies	No. Favoring Departmental System	Percentage Favoring Departmental System
Eighth-grade boys.....	106	86	.81
" " girls.....	123	112	.91
 Seventh-grade boys.....	116	84	.72
" " girls.....	117	100	.85

BY HALF GRADES

A8 boys.....	52	43	.82
B8 "	54	43	.79
A7 "	63	53	.84
B7 "	53	31	.58
 A8 girls.....	56	51	.91
B8 "	67	61	.91
A7 "	61	55	.90
B7 "	56	45	.81

Taken by solid grades, we see that the boys advance from 72 per cent who favor the departmental system in the seventh grade, to 81 per cent who favor it in the eighth. The girls advance from 85 per cent to 91 per cent.

When we study the progress by half-grades, we observe that the boys do not take to the new system, or do not adjust themselves to it, so readily as the girls. In the course of the four terms, however, they show a more rapid transformation of opinion than do the girls. They become "converted" very rapidly, after they have once made the adjustment. The girls adjust themselves more quickly and in larger numbers in the B₇ grade and practically "strike their gait" in the A₇.

REASONS FOR PREFERENCE

The second topic in the questionnaire: "State the reason for the answer you give," elicited many interesting replies.

Table II classifies the reasons as closely as it was possible to group them.

TABLE II
REASONS FAVORING DEPARTMENTAL SYSTEM

	Improved Teaching through Specialization	Change and Variety	Prepares for High School	Easier for Teachers	Seems to Shorten Time	Custom	Gives Change to Teachers	Getting Along Better through Having Several Teachers	More Interesting	Miscellaneous	Total
Boys . . .	131	31	7	10	2	2	0	2	0	4	189
Girls . . .	138	69	7	10	0	7	5	3	3	7	249
Total . . .	269	100	14	20	2	9	5	5	3	11	438

REASONS FAVORING ONE-TEACHER SYSTEM

	Dislikes Confusion of Changing from Room to Room	Gains Time	Easier to Get Used to One Teacher	Knows Standing in Other Subjects	Better Teaching	Knows Pupils Better	Accustomed to Old Way	More Interesting for Teacher	Miscellaneous	Total
Boys	12	15	14	1	4	3	1	0	5	55
Girls	4	3	11	2	3	4	0	1	2	30
Total	16	18	25	3	7	7	1	1	7	85

As will be seen, 269 of the 438 reasons assigned for preferring the departmental system had reference to improved teaching through specialization. "We learn more," said several, "because the teacher can teach two or three subjects better than eight or nine." "I like different teachers for different subjects," said one boy (and he was representative of many others), "because they know their subjects better and can teach them better." This view of the value of the departmental system bears out strongly, from the pupils' point of view, the *a priori* and theoretical argument advanced by those schoolmen who favored its introduction. The experience and testimony of the children themselves confirm the view that the departmental system means a measure of specialization with resultant better teaching.

The variety, change, and increased interest that come from having several teachers instead of one is the reason that appeals to 100 of those who favor the departmental system. This reason is expressed in various ways, but it usually falls back upon two forms: either they feel relief from the monotony of one teacher all the time, or they assert their liking and preference for several teachers as over against one, because it gives variety and affords change. It is not unlikely that the three who assert that it is "more interesting" to have several teachers than only one, and the two who say that it seems to "shorten the day," have the thought of variety in mind, but there was not enough certainty to justify classification under that head. The same thing is possibly true with regard to the five who prefer the departmental system because they can "get along better with several teachers than with one." On the other hand, this last-named reason may refer to "getting along" in studies and may properly be classified under "improved teaching." However, they have been listed as separate reasons in lieu of any positive means of identification.

That the departmental system means more effective teaching and gives greater variety and interest to school life is amply sustained by the responses of the pupils. Sixty-one per cent assign "improved teaching" as the reason for their preference and 22 per cent assign "variety and change." Grouping them, we find that these two reasons include 83 per cent of the replies.

It was noticeable that only 14 of the 438 assigned as the reason for their preference the better introduction to the high school afforded by the departmental system. In theoretical arguments for the departmental system this point is prominently stressed—and rightly so—but with the pupils themselves it involved an anticipation of experience which naturally did not occur to many of them.

Twenty are of a distinctly altruistic type and prefer the departmental system, not because it is of advantage to themselves, but because it is "easier for the teacher"! May their consideration for their teachers never falter! Five others have the teacher's comfort in mind when they give as their reason, "it gives change and variety to the teacher." These twenty-five have at least kindly hearts!

REASONS FOR PREFERRING ONE-TEACHER SYSTEM

Of the 85 reasons given for preferring the one-teacher system, 25 (29 per cent) named the fact that it was easier to get used to one teacher than to several. There is, of course, something to be said for this point—at least from the side of the pupil. Again, 18 were of the opinion that the one-teacher system was preferable because it saved time. Time is lost, according to them, in the movement of classes from one room to another. This parsimonious attitude toward time, in the light of the reckless way in which most young people of that age squander it, is a curious phenomenon. Allied closely with the time loss involved in moving from room to room, is the point made by 16 pupils that it also caused confusion and disturbance, and for that reason the one-teacher system was to be preferred.

Seven thought better teaching resulted from the one-teacher system—just the reverse of the argument offered by 61 per cent of those who favored the departmental system. Another group of 7 preferred the one-teacher system because it enabled the teacher to know her pupils better. There is doubtless an element of legitimacy in this reason.

The group of 85 who favored the one-teacher system were evidently not interested in the teacher's comfort or happiness, for

only one considered the question from her point of view, and his only comment was that he thought the one-teacher system was "more interesting for the teacher."

The remaining ten reasons were of a heterogeneous nature and no classification of them was possible.

Many of the replies had an element of originality and humor in them, and a few of the choice ones are here reproduced. In expressing her preference for the departmental system, one girl said, "I would rather have three teachers than one because when you get into business you may have more than one 'boss' and you will be used to it because you had more than one teacher, and a person can learn more with different teachers because you get tired of seeing the same teacher every day and all day that you don't feel like studying."

A boy who felt that the departmental system involved a loss of time expressed himself as follows: "I prefer one teacher for all subjects, because in passing from one room to another we lose time and have to rush to make up this at the end of the term."

Another boy in giving his reasons for preferring different teachers for different subjects, said, "My reason is that it is nicer to hear different teachers' voices during school time."

"I like different teachers for different subjects," said still another boy, "because it makes the day shorter"—certainly a desirable result if it can be achieved!

Here is a young lady who got into deep water in her reply, but managed to drag herself out in the last sentence. "My reason is," she says, "for liking different teachers for different subjects, that I think I can learn better, and that they are more strict than the teacher I always have, and I like this better. Not saying the teacher I always have is not strict."

The girl next quoted expresses her reason in both a positive and a negative manner. "The reason I would like different teachers," she says, "is because we might learn more, or if we had one teacher why maybe we might not learn as much."

Here is a boy who has a curious notion of what one teacher is doing when a class is reciting to another. "I like different teachers for different subjects," he says, "because it gives our teacher time to mark papers while we are in the other rooms."

Next comes a boy who likes music, for he says, "I like different teachers for different subjects because in Miss M.'s room she has a piano, and for history it don't make much difference."

That the departmental system makes for variety and interest is expressed rather forcibly in several instances. One girl says, "It is kind of dreary having one teacher all day." Another one says, "It gets me tired to have one teacher all day." "We get tired," says another, "of being under the same control all day."

Here's a boy who evidently thinks the teacher who teaches all subjects is in a sadly distracted state. "I like different teachers," he says, "because one teacher doesn't know which study we need the most."

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it may be said that the advantages theoretically assumed by schoolmen for the departmental system have been abundantly confirmed by the evidence and experience of the pupils themselves. When 382 out of 462 young people, who are actually working and living under this system, indicate their preference for it, it may be accepted as at least collateral evidence that the system is successful; that it is meeting the situation it was designed to meet, and that it appeals to the intelligence and interest of the boy and girl of the upper grammar-school period.

The writer makes no claim that the data of this article are conclusive. The results of the inquiry are interesting and significant; they show how the children themselves feel about the system; they shed a little side light on the subject. That is all that is claimed for the inquiry.